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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 05 HONG KONG 00219

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SUBJECT: CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM HALF A YEAR LATER: WHAT
HAPPENED? WHAT'S NEXT?

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and both parties likely would have lobbied strongly against any additional concessions to the democrats. (Interestingly, some younger, non-Legco members of the Democratic Party wanted to support the Government proposal, since they believed it would have enhanced their own chances to win Legco seats in the future. But the party leadership concluded from the outset that their political influence would be diluted under the Tsang proposal.) From the so-called pro-Government parties' point of view, and, many thought, from Beijing's point of view, it was all the same, whether the proposal passed, or whether the status quo was unchanged. (Some here believe, however, that at least some senior leaders in Beijing were unhappy with the proposal's failure, and wanted to see some limited movement.) But only the Tsang administration had prestige or power at stake in the success of the proposal.

¶10. (C) The large turnout at the December 4 march was important, and the united appearance of the pro-democracy legislators was probably even more important in cementing their commitment. The unexpected participation of former Chief Secretary Anson Chan, who had not previously identified herself with pro-democracy efforts, transformed the dynamic, placing at the movement's head a figure as clearly "mainstream" and popular as the CE himself. This had a powerful impact on public opinion and provided pro-democracy legislators with broad political cover.

Counting the votes

¶11. (C) The Government needed to secure six votes in addition to the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) and Liberal Party (LP) members that Beijing presumably told to line up behind Tsang. Those votes existed in a block of six pro-democracy but independent Legco members, where Tsang focused all his lobbying effort. To prevail, the

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Democrats merely needed to hold at least one of them. The pro-democracy independents, who had been elected by tying themselves to the slogan of democracy, feared betraying their constituents. If they stayed in opposition to Tsang, they could be seen as standing for a simple, clear principle: universal suffrage, as soon as possible. But Tsang worked hard to win them over to his incrementalist approach, arguing that defeat of a proposal that Beijing accepted would be a serious setback to democracy in Hong Kong. Before the vote, the mainstream Democrats were keeping watch on the waverers, ready to intervene at the slightest sign of weakness.

¶12. (C) Most of our sources agree that Tsang had long believed he would get the six additional votes, and in fact had convinced 5 of the 6 to support him. One of them, pro-democracy Tsang confidante Albert "Taipan" Cheng, on the eve of December 4 pro-democracy march, published a thinly veiled protest at pressure from within the democracy movement to maintain a united opposition to the plan.

Then-independent, now Civic Party member, Mandy Tam, who represents the accountancy functional constituency, was the sixth vote and seemed just before the vote to be moving to the Tsang side. But at the last minute she withdrew from negotiations with the Government after an emotional meeting with a close Democratic colleague. Tam has confirmed this to us, adding that the Government seems to blame her above all others for the proposal's defeat. When it became clear that her vote would defeat the government, the other five moved back into opposition so as not be charged with betraying their democratic principles.

Who won, who lost?

¶13. (C) Immediately after the December 21 failure of the Government's plan (ref a), the conventional wisdom was that Chief Executive (CE) Donald Tsang had been hurt, and that the

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